

Controversy trails death toll as army-youth clash in Akwa Ibom

By Egufe Yafugborhi

UJYO = CONFLICT
A **UJYO = CONFLICT** number of casualties trailed weekend violent confrontation between troops of the 2 Brigade, Nigerian Army, and youths in Ukpe Efe, Ikot Abasi Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State.

While the community claimed two persons were killed and others critically wounded, the army confirmed one dead, highlighting tensions between security operatives and host communities in oil-producing regions of the state.

At the time of this report, authorities are yet to release an official statement clarifying the situation.

Assistant Director of Army Public Relations, Headquarters 2 Brigade, Captain Lawal Bala Muhammad, said the clash erupted after troops received information that criminal elements were siphoning diesel from equipment belonging to Sterling Petroleum and Fertilizer Limited, SPFL.

"To checkmate the criminals, the troops conducted follow-up operations, leading to the arrest of a driver conveying the stolen products," Captain Muhammad

stated. "While returning the suspect and exhibit to the company, youths barricaded the road in an attempt to free the suspect. They hurled bottles and stones at the troops. Despite efforts to de-escalate, the situation worsened."

He said troops initially fired warning shots, and when the unrest continued, a ring leader was shot in the leg and evacuated to the hospital. Reinforcements were later deployed, and during subsequent operations, a dead body—yet to be identified—was discovered and evacuated to the mortuary.

While the army confirmed only one death, residents painted a grimmer picture.

Emmanuel Ekwere alleged, "Troops of the Nigerian Army deployed to provide security to SPFL have again orchestrated a heavy-handed siege on our community, killing two persons and critically wounding others. This is not the first incident of its kind, and we call on the State government to intervene in this perennial crisis."

SPFL's Media Manager, Aniekeme Finbarr, clarified that the incident occurred about 15km from the company's operational base and expressed sympathy for the affected families.

"Our deepest condolences